

Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: Exodus 20:1-17

Background

Lent has begun and now we begin our long walk toward the resurrection light. It is often said that we cannot experience the joy of Easter without first experiencing the pain of Good Friday; this is true also of walking through the season of Lent. In Lent we search ourselves and face, head on, the vices that separate us from God. During this season we dedicate ourselves, through discipline and prayer, to growing closer to God and letting go of the things that distract us. In Year B of our Lectionary Cycle, the current lectionary year, we are blessed to experience a journey of covenant with God. Each week in this Lenten season we explore a text from the Hebrew Scriptures that focuses on an aspect of covenant with God. Through our exploration of the historical covenants with God we will seek to open for the children ways in which God invites us into covenant today.

A Notation for This Week's Scripture

We've all heard of the 10 Commandments. Many of the children who will be in class today will have at least heard of the phrase "The 10 Commandments," but how many of them will know where they came from or understand what they mean for our lives today? Jerome Berryman calls his Godly Play lesson for the 10 Commandments "The 10 Best Ways" as a way of translating for young children the understanding that these rule were meant to instruct the people of Israel in a philosophy that would help them to live as their best selves. The people were wandering in the desert, following Moses out of slavery in Egypt, searching for the land flowing with milk and honey they had been promised. The people were getting tired of wandering and searching and started to rebel against Moses and against God. They had put up with enough and wanted to find immediate gratification for their

needs. This made God sad and perplexed Moses, who felt ill equipped to get the people back on track. So God spoke to Moses and gave him these 10 straightforward, but deeply challenging rules to assist the people in following God and honoring the “dignity of every human being.”

Theme: God is the Way

Before Class:

1. Make sure there are enough bibles in your classroom for each student to have one. 2. Gather construction paper, markers, stickers, scissors, and glue sticks for each student. 3. Have painter’s tape available to hang up the activity.

Beginning: After all of the children arrive play a brief game of Suzie Says. You will be Suzie, the class members are the players or followers. Standing in front of the group, Suzie tells players what they must do. However, the players must only obey commands that begin with the words “ Suzie Says.” If Suzie says, “ Suzie says touch your nose,” then players must touch their nose. But if Suzie says, “Jump up and down” without prefacing it with the words, “Suzie says...” the class

should not comply. If someone acts when you do not say “Suzie says” ask that person to sit down. Play for a few minutes, there is no winner so there is no need to play until there is only one person left.

Explain to the class: “Today we are going to read the 10 Commandments. How many of you have heard of the 10 Commandments?” (wait for a show of hands) “Who can tell us about the 10 Commandments?” (Allow some of the students to explain about the 10 Commandments as best as they are able.) “How are the 10 Commandments similar to the game we just played? How are they different?” (Make sure to illuminate the God would never ask us to do something that we shouldn’t do.) “Our job today will be to listen to the 10 Commandments and then think of ways we can help other kids your age understand them better. So make sure you listen the best you are able as we read them one by one.”

Opening Prayer: *Holy God, Strengthen us each day to walk in your way.
Amen.*

The Story: Exodus 20:1-17

Invite the class to open their bibles to the passage. You will go around the group and each student will read one of the commandments. Thus, the students will read the verses as follows:

1. verses 1-3 *There is only One God.
2. verses 4-6 *Don't make anything else into something you worship.
3. verse 7 *Don't say God as a bad word; don't use God's name to hurt people.
4. verses 8-11 *You need to take a break from all work one day. Do things that bring you joy and help you get closer to God.
5. verse 12 *Respect your parents.
6. verse 13 *Don't kill people.
7. verse 14 *Don't hurt the people you love.
8. verse 15 *Don't take things that do not belong to you.
9. verse 16 *Always tell the truth.
10. verse 17 *Be thankful for the things you have.

After each reader, pause, and talk about what each of the commandments mean. A kid-friendly suggested translation of each commandment is provided.

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder why God made the first commandment to have only one God.
- I wonder which commandment is the most important.
- I wonder if any of the commandments are harder than the others.
- I wonder which one is the least important.
- I wonder why God gave the commandments to the people.

Activity: Who remembers the signs or reminders God sent the people to remind them of their covenant with God in our last two stories? (The

Rainbow and changing Abram and Sarai's names...) What is different about those signs and today's covenantal sign? (The 10 Commandments are physical slates with literal rules to follow. They are concrete and tangible.) God saw the need for us to have something we could actually touch and feel to teach us the law.

Today we are going to make our own tangible reminder of God's law for us. We will write our own "Ten Commandments for Sharing God's Love" that the students can take home and share with others. Some of the Commandments might come from the list in the Bible; some of the Commandments might be new.

Start by asking the students which commandments we should use from the list.

Next, ask the students to think of some ideas for Commandments we should add to the list.

Some ideas might be:

- Sit with new kids at lunch.
- Invite kids who are alone to play with us at recess.
- Let my baby brother play my video game with me.
- Send a card to my neighbor, "just because."

After the kids feel confident in their list, invite them to find ways to illustrate the list by dividing it up and asking each child to write and decorate one (or more) of the commandments on a piece of construction paper.

Getting Closure: After all of the commandments are illustrated, hang them up around the room. Take a walk, as a group to look at each commandment and to talk about how that commandment helps us to honor God.

Closing Prayer: *Dear God, You sent the Commandments to help the Israelites to follow you. Help us to hear your commandments with new ears and to use them in our lives today. Amen.*